

ARTICLE APPEARED  
IN WASHINGTON POSTWASHINGTON POST  
29 January 1985

# Tom Clancy, Double Agent

Besides the Spy Novel  
'Red October,' He  
Also Writes Insurance

By Peter Masley  
Washington Post Staff Writer

*You could tell right away that the approaching lecturer was a CIA type: He walked across the snow and left no footprints. He said his name was "Tom Clancy," but everyone knows there are hundreds of "Tom Clancys" at the agency using thousands of cover stories. Then he declared that he was really an insurance broker down in rural Calvert County, where that big nuclear reactor pulses, and that he got an English degree at Loyola College in Baltimore. Ha.*

*But the part of his "legend" that most strained credulity was this: "Clancy" said someone paid him \$35 to write a letter to the editor a couple of years ago and so he became a writer. Then he said he wrote a novel called "The Hunt for Red October" that has sold 45,000 copies, and it wasn't even published in New York. And he did this without a literary agent!*

*Tell us another one, pal.*

Thomas L. Clancy Jr., 37, who uses the sobriquet "Tom Clancy," started writing "The Hunt for Red October" in July 1982 "from the beginning, not knowing how it was going to end. It really was a lot more fun doing it that way . . . If you plan things ahead of time you lose spontaneity."

Thus flying in the face of hallowed literary tradition, he created a story based on the 1975 attempted defection to Sweden of a Soviet destroyer crew. From that event, and a few others, Clancy crafted a fast-paced, strongly plotted and technically solid account of a half-Lithuanian "sub driver" defecting to the West with the Red October, the Soviet Union's newest, stealthiest and most powerful nuclear missile submarine.

"I knew I could look up the facts," Clancy says. "What I didn't know was what kind of people go to sea in ships that are designed to sink." He found out by interviewing submariners and technical experts.

Since publication by the Naval Institute Press in Annapolis last October, "The Hunt for Red October" has had four press runs and hit best-seller lists in Washington, San Francisco and New York City. The Naval Institute Press is preparing a fifth edition of 25,000 copies.

Because "Red October" has sold 45,000 copies, publishing experts call it a "stunning success." (Most first novels by unknown writers sell 3,500 to 5,000 copies.) Considering the additional barriers Clancy faced—no agent and a nonfiction publisher that had never before produced a novel and lacked the brute-force sales and distribution machinery of the New York houses—"Red October" also could be called a breakthrough.

Word of mouth and more than a dozen reviews, some enthusiastic, propelled sales. Paperback rights went to Berkley Publishing Group for \$49,500 and United Kingdom rights went for around \$15,000. The Naval Institute Press has sold foreign language rights for Dutch, West German, Japanese and South American editions.

"We don't have any pretensions that this is great literature," says Naval Institute Press marketing director Jim Sutton, "It is just a hell of a good read."

"O.F. Bowen Agency," Clancy answers the telephone.

This is Clancy at work. He writes policies as well as books. In the summer thousands of people drive by his office at the Bowen Agency in Owings on Maryland Rte. 260 on their way to Chesapeake Beach, four miles down the highway.

"When did you last have a policy with us?" he asks a caller. "What is your name? How old are you?" Clancy and his wife, Wanda, who operate the agency, have 1,000 clients in Southern Maryland.

On the floor of Clancy's office is a large blue bag that houses the Apple Macintosh computer he composes on when there's down time in the insurance business. Along the walls are war games, books on weapons, and government-produced maps of Germany he is using to write his second novel.

"When you're your own boss," Clancy says, "you can budget your time." If writing weren't fun, Clancy says, "I wouldn't do it. I don't need the money. This business supports me rather well."

Among Clancy's insurance clients are people he calls "nucs"—pronounced "nukes"—former Navy nuclear engineers who operate the Baltimore Gas & Electric Co.'s Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Station

on the Chesapeake Bay, 20 miles south of the Bowen Agency. Clancy mined them for technical information about the nuclear and naval aspects of "Red October." He says the Navy's "nucs" are "the best in the world."

Clancy is well read in his genre of thriller novels. He says Frederick Forsyth "is, at his best, probably